

Derek Wallbank, *MinnPost*

WASHINGTON - At least three of the four returning Minnesota Democrats voted today to keep Speaker Nancy Pelosi as the top Democrat in the House, as she coasted to another term as caucus leader despite Democrats having lost more than 60 seats in the recent elections.

Pelosi survived a late challenge from North Carolina centrist Heath Shuler. The vote was 150-43, not at all close, but more than Shuler said he'd thought he'd get going in.

Reps. Keith Ellison, Betty McCollum and Tim Walz voted to retain Pelosi. A spokeswoman for Rep. Collin Peterson said she didn't immediately know which way her boss had voted, but would check. I'll post that answer as soon as I get it. (Note: I had to ask because the election was closed to the press and conducted by secret ballot)

No matter what people think of Pelosi, she has been an incredibly effective Speaker in Washington. The first woman to ever hold that spot, Pelosi pushed through tough votes on major bills like the health care overhaul, Wall Street reform and carbon cap and trade.

However, her liabilities were seen most clearly outside the Beltway. Her favorability ratings are underwater - just 25 percent approved of her in a Quinnipiac poll out today. The New York Times' Nate Silver noted that her numbers are well below those of other politicians - in fact they most closely track those of disgraced former presidential candidate John Edwards, shortly after his affair became public.

A key GOP strategy in the last election was tying Democrats in conservative districts to Pelosi, whom they dubbed a "San Francisco liberal." It was a line used in every Minnesota district, but especially played up in the 1st, 4th, 7th and 8th District races.

Pelosi told National Public Radio in a recent interview that the widespread Democratic losses weren't because of her, rather they came down to a sour economy and "\$100 million of outside, unidentified funding."

Before the vote to keep Pelosi, Democrats held a vote to delay the leadership election by two weeks for further discussion about the leadership makeup and direction of the party in Congress. Though Walz would vote for Pelosi, he was the only Minnesota Democrat to support the delay.

"Rep. Walz voted to delay leadership elections to a later date because he thinks we need to have a very serious discussion about how to ensure ideas from all parts of our diverse caucus are heard and considered in House leadership," spokeswoman Sara Severs said.

"That being said, when a vote proceeded forward, Rep. Walz made the choice to support someone who has been an aggressive champion of the veterans' issues he cares so deeply about, Speaker Pelosi. Continuing his work on veterans' affairs will be a top priority and he looks forward to fighting for veterans in the upcoming Congress."